

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 28 June 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Susan Little (Mayor), Qaisar Abbas (Deputy Mayor), John Allen, Alex Anderson, Deborah Arnold, Paul Arnold, Gary Byrne, Adam Carter, John Cecil, Daniel Chukwu, Gary Collins, George Coxshall, Jack Duffin, Tony Fish, Aaron Green, James Halden, Vikki Hartstean, Mark Hooper, Mark Hurrell, Andrew Jefferies, Barry Johnson, Tom Kelly, Cathy Kent, John Kent, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Ben Maney, Jacqui Maney, Cici Manwa, Fraser Massey, Valerie Morris-Cook, Sara Muldowney, Augustine Ononaji, Srikanth Panjala, Maureen Pearce, Terry Piccolo, Kairen Raper, Joycelyn Redsell, Elizabeth Rigby, Sue Sammons, Sue Shinnick, Graham Snell, Neil Speight, Luke Spillman, James Thandi, Lee Watson and Lynn Worrall

Apologies: Councillor Robert Gledhill

In attendance: Dr Dave Smith, Chief Executive and Managing Director
Commissioner
Jackie Hinchliffe (Director of HR, OD & Transformation)
Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place
Claire Demmel, Interim Director Public Realm
Asmat Hussain, Director of Legal and Governance and
Monitoring Officer
Alix MacFarlane, Communications Advisor - Intervention and
Improvement (Interim Director)
Steven Mair, Interim Chief Financial Officer
Patrick McDermott, Chief of Staff to the Thurrock
Commissioners
Kerry Thomas, Chief Executive Business Manager
Ian Wake (Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health)
Karen Wheeler (Director Strategy, Engagement and Growth)
Jonathan Wilson, Interim Director Finance & S151 Officer
Matthew Boulter, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy
Monitoring Officer
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

14. Presentation of the Mayor's Consort Chains

The Mayor's consort, Brian Little, received his consort chains.

15. Minutes

Minutes of Annual Council held on the 24 May 2023 were approved as a correct record.

16. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

17. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

18. Announcements on behalf of the Mayor or the Leader of the Council

Councillor Jefferies, Leader of the Council, made the following announcements:

- The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Abbas, had joined dignitaries at a ceremony to unveil a plaque celebrating the 75th anniversary of the arrival of MHT Empire Windrush in Tilbury.
- Ceremonies were held to raise flags for the Armed Forces Day and Pride Month in Thurrock.
- Celebrated the tremendous contribution of the borough's volunteers as part of the volunteer's week.
- Asked residents for their help to water the new trees that had been planted into the borough during the summer months.
- Thanked those members who had help deliver Fostering Leaflets.

19. Questions from Members of the Public

The public question fell as the questioner was not in attendance.

20. Petitions from Members of the Public and Councillors

The Mayor informed the chamber that two notices of petition had been received this evening.

Councillor Kelly presented his petition in regard to tree cutting at Fredrick Andrewes Court. In response to this Councillor Jefferies acknowledged the petition.

Councillor Cecil presented his petition regarding the closure of Lloyds Bank in Corringham. In response to this Councillor Jefferies acknowledged the petition.

21. Petitions Update Report

Members received a report on the status of those petitions handed in at Council meetings and Council offices.

22. Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies, Statutory and Other Panels

The Mayor enquired whether there were any changes to be made to the appointments previously made by committees and outside bodies, statutory and other panels.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jefferies, made the following changes:

To replace Councillor Snell with Councillor Anderson on the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee.

To replace Councillor Pearce with Councillor Polley on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To replace Councillor Sammons with Councillor Carter on the Corporate Parenting Committee.

To replace Councillor Spillman with Councillor Pearce on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To replace Councillor Thandi with Councillor Redsell on the Impulse Outside Body.

To replace Councillor Abbas with Councillor D Arnold on the Constitution Working Group.

To add Councillor Carter as a substitute on the Planning Committee.

The Leader of the Labour group, Councillor J Kent, stated he had no changes to make.

Councillors Allen, Byrne, Massey, and Speight stated they had no changes to make.

23. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23

The Mayor referred Members to the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022/23 as published in the agenda.

The following points were raised:

- The report presented only “good new stories”, should also have included those projects that had not been so successful or had experienced issues.
- The report had not identified any flaws in the overview and scrutiny process.

- That next year's report should identify the changes being made to the scrutiny function.
- A waste review was required on the Cleaner Greener & Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The good work to reinstate the brown bins was acknowledged.
- The fostering programme had been recognised as good work undertaken by the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny committee.
- The good work of the Planning Transport & Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been recognised in setting up a group to look at the Integrated Transport Block and the Area Intervention Programme.
- A point was made that there had been two attempts to reform the scrutiny process over the past two years which had been stopped by the opposition.
- A further point was made that the focus of scrutiny should be on those items that were important rather than urgent, fewer committees, larger membership and had until January 2024 to undertake this work.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022/23 were noted.

24. Best Value Inspection Report

The Leader introduced and welcomed the Best Value Inspection report which highlighted the serious and significant failings in terms of leadership of administration of the past, all members had to agree to the recommendations and understand where all 49 members had failed in their duties. The report had laid bare the poor scrutiny, lack of challenge to officers and overall poor governance. Identified other areas in the council where mistakes had been made and the overall culture of Thurrock council and would seek to make improvements to these. He thanked all councillors who had stepped up to contribute to the improvements in the council culture and who were seeking to improve their own skills. Thurrock had remarkable potential and would continue to see it thrive and believed Thurrock had a bright future.

At 7.46pm, Councillor Fish entered the chamber.

Some of the main themes of the debate made by the Labour Group were:

- Members agreed to the recommendations.
- Millions of pounds of the council's money had been gambled, information had been covered up and the report had highlighted the council was not well led by the administration.
- Welcomed the Best Value Inspection report.
- Issues had to be listened to.
- Best Value Inspection report had highlighted red flags, questioned what had been shared and when questions were asked why no answers were forthcoming.

- Recognised the culture of the council had to change.
- Concern that backbench members would not have enough oversight and have a say in the way forward for Thurrock.
- Angry as Chair of Standard and Audit Committee had been lied to on reports presented.
- The Council's money had been gambled.
- Shame on the administration.
- How to make sure this never happened again.
- Shame that the report had been published following the elections.
- Residents should be given the opportunity to decide in their vote.
- The ex-Leader and Cabinet Member had got away lightly, no officer accountability who were not fit for office or to serve the residents of this borough.

Some of the main themes of the debate made by the Conservative Group were:

- Members agreed to the recommendations.
- All members should accept responsibility.
- Failures have been acknowledged.
- Culture of the council had been a concern.
- Constitution will need to be changed so that all members are heard.
- There was a bright future for Thurrock.
- There had been a lack of understanding.
- It was important to understand where the Council was now and how it could move on.
- Prevent further damaging the council financially.
- Recognised the culture of the council had to change, blame culture was not good, everyone made mistakes.
- Confidence from residents that members could now make a change.
- Reflect from the Best Value Inspection report and move on towards what needed to be put right.
- Grateful to officers.
- Need to ask where and what can be done better.
- Member training being offered was good.
- All 49 members had to work together to get through this.
- The Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny committee will pick up some of the projects, so this does not happen again.

Some of the main themes of the debate made by the Independent Members were:

- Members agreed to the recommendations.
- Welcomed the Best Value Inspection report.
- The Leader and Officers had been helpful, committed and willingly open to speak to members.

- Not for all 49 members to take responsibility as some had only taken up office in May 2023.
- Concern over the diversity and equality implications written within the report.
- Not accept any onus on the failures that had taken place.
- Members were under a false understanding and were misled.
- Use the expertise of all opposition members.

RESOLVED

1. That Council noted the publication of the Best Value Inspection report on 15 June 2023.
2. Agreed to incorporate the recommendations of the report within the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan.

25. Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the chamber that five questions to the Leader and eleven questions to cabinet members had been received:

Asked by	Asked to	Subject
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Johnson	Police investigation into Thurrock's financial affairs.
Councillor Worrall	Councillor Jefferies	What openness and transparency mean to the leader
Councillor J Maney	Councillor Jefferies	ULEZ extension
Councillor J Maney	Councillor Jefferies	Findings of the Best Value Inspection report
Councillor J Kent	Councillor Jefferies	Overspend of widening of the A13
Councillor Byrne	Councillor Jefferies	About the money in preventing a bin weekly collection service
Councillor Pearce	Councillor Carter	New school site in Love Lane, Aveley
Councillor Pearce	Councillor Coxshall	Environmental extremists – Police and Council deal with any future disruptions in the borough
Councillor Redsell	Councillor Jefferies	Concern on serious fires occurring in Hangman's Wood
Councillor Redsell	Councillor Coxshall	Community safety tackling nuisance off road motorbikes
Councillor Ononaji	Councillor Coxshall	Anti-social behaviour at

		Chafford Hundred train station
Councillor P Arnold	Councillor B Maney	School Crossing Patrol officers being withdrawn
Councillor Worrall	Councillor Jefferies	Tackling grass verges
Councillor J Kent	Councillor Carter	Priorities for the municipal year as Portfolio Holder
Councillor J Kent	Councillor B Maney	Introduction of residents parking in Richmond Road Grays
Councillor Fish	Councillor Johnson	Window replacement scheme in high rise flats in South Grays

The recording of the questions and responses can be found from the following link:

[Council - Wednesday 28 June 2023, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

26. Reports from Members representing the Council on Outside Bodies

Councillor Speight presented an update on the East Thurrock Community Association outside body that he represented in that the council had no record of what the appointment entailed. Councillor Speight stated this was a very important organisation within his ward and was looking forward to meeting with association members on the council's behalf.

Councillor Speight queried those outside bodies that had been removed from the report such as Coalhouse Fort.

27. Minutes of Committees

The minutes of committees as set out in the agenda were received.

28. Update on motions resolved at Council during the previous year

Members received an information report updating the progress in respect of motions received at Council.

29. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent

The Motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor J Kent and seconded by Councillor Morris-Cook. The Motion read as follows:

Council recognises the refuse service has failed the residents of Thurrock for too long and calls on Cabinet to ensure the regular collection of all three bins.

Councillor J Kent presented his motion by stating until relatively recently the council had a refuse service to be proud of and paid tribute to all those that

work in the service. Over the last few years the quality of the service had deteriorated to such a degree that was now clearly failing residents of the borough and had never received so many complaints. Residents had questioned if the council could not even empty bins how they could be trusted in leading the recovery of the council's financial catastrophe. Referred to the brown bin service which had been a disaster with many residents not having their bin emptied for months on end. Pleased that cabinet had decided to alternate the blue and brown bins but had concerns this was only an interim measure pending another review of the service, which would be the third review in so many years. Summed by up stating this chaos had to stop as residents want their bins emptied on the day it was promised to be emptied.

The following points were made:

- There was a fundamental lack of understand of a basic council service.
- The portfolio holder had listened and agreed to the alternative collections of recycling and garden collections.
- The Cleaner Greener Safer Overview Committee would continue to engage with the portfolio holder openly and with respect but would continue to fulfil the scrutiny function and expect to be taken seriously.
- Engagement must take place with all front-line staff with an end to unproductive confrontation.
- Disappointment to read the proposed full bin service presented and signed off as part of the budget was not want was going to happen and pleased that Dr Smith and the portfolio holder had turned this around.
- Await with interest to see the latest edition of the waste strategy plan.
- The waste management working group had been set up in 2019 to look at services and recycling but since that time the service had deteriorated.
- Thought needed to be given to those residents who received assisted bin collections.
- Some of the comments made this evening were hurtful towards staff and bin crews who over the last six months had worked incredible hard.
- Praise was given to the portfolio holder and the refuse crew.
- To look at the mechanism of the "Report It" and on-line system to ensure this worked satisfactory when residents used it.

The Mayor extended time by 20 minutes to allow the remaining business to be heard.

Councillor J Kent summed up by requesting a show of hands when voting.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

With 48 votes in favour, the motion was carried.

30. Motion submitted by Councillor Speight

The Motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor Speight and seconded by Councillor Halden. The Motion read as follows:

Residents get nine, or at best ten, opportunities a year to see their council in full action. Far too often vital matters are not discussed because of the guillotine regulations which foreshorten debate and discussion. This has led, in the past, to political filibustering and spurious questions to ensure that matters are not discussed in public because of the time limitation. This is not democracy in action. For full meetings only, councillors and officers should be expected to give whatever time is necessary to discuss matters. This motion does not seek to remove the limits of time individual councillors get to speak, but to remove the guillotine on separate sections of the meeting; henceforth this council calls on cabinet and/or the constitution working group to review the constitution as a matter of urgency and subsequently allow monthly full council meetings to run their full length without the need to invoke standing orders for an extension.

The following points were made:

- There had been improvements made to the process over the last couple of years by extended the guillotine time, provided more time for questions and motions, and moved portfolio holder reports to scrutiny committees.
- There were plenty of other changes that could be introduced, but there were only certain ways to change the constitution to achieve a better democratic level of debate.
- All members should become more actively involved to strengthen and broaden the debate in the constitution.
- The call-in process could potentially stop the art of decision making.
- The Mayor was asked to allow unlimited time at council meetings to allow time for questions and motions to ensure the business could be concluded until the consultation had been completed and had been reflected in the constitution.
- Point was made that all officers and members should remain in committee meetings until all business had been completed.
- Point raised that there had to be a sensible time for meetings to finish.
- Need to look at the type of questions coming forward particularly those that could be asked directly to officers outside of the meeting.

Councillor Speight summed up by urging all members for their support.

The Mayor called a vote on the Motion.

With 47 votes in favour, the motion was carried.

31. Motion submitted by Councillor J Kent

The Motion, as printed in the agenda was proposed by Councillor J Kent and seconded by Councillor Kerin. The Motion read as follows:

Council welcomes the release of the Best Value Inspection report, endorses its recommendations, and resolves to move to all out elections from May 2024.

Councillor J Kent presented the motion by stating in the past he had been a supporter of elections by thirds but given the catastrophic failure of the council's finances and the findings from the Best Value Inspection report it was clear the move to all out elections must be undertaken as soon as possible. It was important not to allow this decision to be stalled as the Best Value Inspection report had noted the work to bring member attention to the big strategic issues was only possible a few months each year before they entered into election mode the following year. The improvement and recovery plan needed to be delivered as quickly as possible without any distraction of having two sets of elections within the next two years. Costs would also be incurred twice if delaying the all out elections. Councillor J Kent summed up by stating residents needed to have their say as quickly as possible and urged members to move to all out elections from next year.

An amendment to this motion had been received from Councillor Jefferies and seconded by Councillor Coxshall and read as follows:

Council welcomes the release of the Best Value Inspection report, endorses its recommendations, and resolves to request the independent boundary review be sped up to allow for an all-out election as soon as possible.

Councillor Jefferies presented the amended motion by endorsing the Best Value Inspection that all out elections were needed but did not want to see the public purse having to carry out and pay for election after election. The boundary review was required to be completed as quickly as possible and then go for all out elections.

The following points were made:

- The current offering of thirds, all out and then another all out for boundary review was not acceptable.
- Understood the council in its state required to have a secure administration going forward.
- Concern that if the boundary review took place in 2024, could mean a triple hit of elections with no sense of recovery.
- Members needed to get together to find a sensible resolution.
- All out elections would save money.
- It was important to get the boundary review underway as soon as possible before moving to all out elections.
- There were no pending boundary reviews on the boundary commission website for Thurrock.
- The council needed to be reset and change was welcomed.
- Thurrock residents deserved forthright representation in the chamber and proposed two elections one 2024 and one in 2025.
- Point made that all out four elections provided continuity between members and officers.
- Members previously agreed the Best Value Inspection report recommendations, one of those recommendations was a four-year election.

- There was no mention of a boundary review in recommendation 6.
- Residents had the right to judge by voting in an all out election, this was the right time for this to take place.

At 10.18pm, Councillor J Kent raised a standing order to allow the meeting to continue until the close of business. All members agreed.

The Mayor called a vote on the amended Motion to which Councillor J Kent requested a requisition vote.

For: Councillors Abbas, Anderson, D Arnold, P Arnold, Carter, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Halden, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, Little, B Maney, J Maney, Ononaji, Pearce, Piccolo, Redsell, Rigby, Sammons, Snell, Spillman and Thandi (24)

Against: Councillors Allen, Byrne, Cecil, Chukwu, Fish, Green, Hartstean, Hooper, Hurrell, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Liddiard, Manwa, Massey, Morris-Cook, Muldowney, Panjala, Raper, Shinnick, Speight, Watson and Worrall (23)

Abstain: (0)

The Mayor announced the amended motion was carried.

The Mayor called a vote on the substantive motion to which Councillor J Kent requested a requisition vote.

For: Councillors Abbas, Anderson, D Arnold, P Arnold, Carter, Cecil, Chukwu, Collins, Coxshall, Duffin, Fish, Green, Halden, Hartstean, Hooper, Hurrell, Jefferies, Johnson, Kelly, C Kent, J Kent, Kerin, Liddiard, Little, B Maney, J Maney, Manwa, Morris-Cook, Muldowney, Ononaji, Panjala, Pearce, Piccolo, Raper, Redsell, Rigby, Sammons, Shinnick, Snell, Spillman, Thandi, Watson and Worrall (43)

Against: Councillors, Allen, Byrne and Speight (3)

Abstain: Councillor Massey (1)

The Mayor announced the substantive Motion carried.

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The meeting finished at 10.55 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**